



## CONNECTICUT ATHLETIC TRAINERS' ASSOCIATION

March 17, 2010

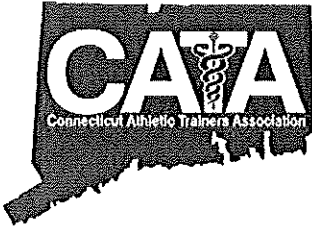
Testimony of Vicky Graham, ATC, LAT  
Connecticut Athletic Trainers' Association  
RE: RSB 456, "An Act Concerning Student Athletes and Concussions."

Good afternoon Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann and members of the Education Committee. My name is Vicky Graham, President-Elect of the Connecticut Athletic Trainers' Association. On behalf of the CATA, I would like to thank the Committee for its attention to the issue of sports-related brain injuries. The CATA fully supports RSB 456 "An Act Concerning Student Athletes and Concussions." Athletic trainers have long been on the frontlines in managing sports-related concussion. This bill will help coaches, school administrators, parents and student athletes to recognize that concussion has serious consequences, and should be managed appropriately. As someone who currently practices in intercollegiate athletics, and who has experience with high school athletics as well, I can personally attest to the fact that what we know now about concussion has significantly changed the way I manage concussion now, as opposed to even ten years ago.

We have learned a great deal about concussion in the past decade or so. I'd like to provide a few facts for your consideration:

- 400,000 concussions occurred in high school athletics during the 2008-09 school year.
- Athletes who return to play before being recovered from an initial concussion are at risk for what is known as "second impact syndrome," which can result in permanent brain damage. 50% of these incidents result in death.
- Female high school soccer players sustain nearly 40% more concussions than male soccer players. Female high school basketball players sustain 240% more concussions than male basketball players.
- Even when concussion symptoms disappear in as little as 15 minutes, 75% of those tested 36 hours later still had problems with memory and cognition.

We know now that "getting your bell rung" or "getting dinged" are not inconsequential occurrences. They are brain injuries. This bill will require coaches to have regular training in recognizing the signs and symptoms of concussion, and in understanding the consequences of activity when an individual is not yet recovered from concussion. Coaches will be responsible for removing athletes who exhibit signs or symptoms of concussion from activity, and not allowing them to return to activity until they have been evaluated by a qualified health care professional.



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Washington and Oregon have passed similar legislation recently, in response to the tragic consequences of an undiagnosed concussion resulting in permanent brain damage in a high school football player. This bill seeks to prevent that type of situation from happening here in Connecticut. Several other states currently have similar bills under consideration.

The CATA, Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference (CIAC), Connecticut State Medical Society (CSMS), and Connecticut Association of Athletic Directors (CAAD) are collaborating on developing the concussion education piece for coaches. The training for coaches that the bill would require is under development and nearly complete. It will be incorporated into the current coaching certification course and continuing education requirements for coaches. Coaches currently are required to hold current first aid & CPR as part of maintaining their coaching certification. (First aid does not include training on concussion signs and symptoms). The coaching certificate is a 5 year certificate, with 15 hours of continuing education required for renewal.

It is important to recognize that part of the conversation about concussion and about keeping student athletes safe needs be about providing adequate medical coverage for secondary school athletic programs. Schools sponsoring athletic programs have a responsibility to provide adequate medical oversight of student-athletes. Both the American Medical Association and American Academy of Family Physicians have made recommendations that an athletic trainer be a part of the secondary school athletic program. The bare minimum standard of a coach trained in first aid and CPR should not be acceptable, particularly when a school is sponsoring collision and contact sports. Student athlete safety should come first, and having athletic trainers in secondary schools should be a consideration of every school, as well as of this committee.

This bill helps send the message that concussions should be taken seriously. The bottom line on this bill is student athlete safety. That always has to come first. This bill will help to start to change the culture of the "suck it up"/warrior mentality prevalent in sports to a "play hard, but play smart" mentality. We need to make it not only acceptable for an athlete to report symptoms of concussion, but preferable for them to report, rather than hide their symptoms. This bill is not an unfunded mandate. The training that will be required is being developed already, and is almost complete. It will not cost the state anything to implement this bill. On behalf of the CATA, I want to ask each of you to support RSB 456, "An Act Concerning Student-Athletes and Concussions." Thank you.